

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 6, 2025

Hon. Doug Burgum
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Burgum:

Since your confirmation as Secretary of the Interior, we have been in constant, direct communication with you about the importance of protecting the cultural landscape around Chaco Culture National Historical Park (CCNHP). We have invited you to follow in your predecessors' footsteps and visit New Mexico to conduct robust Tribal consultation and community outreach before taking any action on the existing mineral withdrawal around Chaco. Unfortunately, we are writing to express extreme disappointment about the expedited actions the Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) have taken to formally initiate the process of revoking Public Land Order (PLO) No. 7923, which currently protects a 10-mile buffer around CCNHP.

Tribes are sovereign governments, and you have a legal trust obligation to Tribal leaders to operate with the highest responsibility and trust, which is not reflected by your expedited actions and unclear directions. In addition, under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), you are legally required to ensure that you consider how your actions will affect historic properties, which also requires consulting with each relevant Tribal government. These steps must be taken before pursuing your proposed action. Further, they should not be conducted on an arbitrary "expedited timeline" that risks disregarding the needs and priorities of Tribes. Furthermore, in your appearance before the House Natural Resources Committee on June 12, 2025, you committed your Department to sending someone with decision-making authority to conduct in-person, individual Tribal consultation with each Tribe that has an interest in Chaco Canyon.

While meaningful consultation will be exceedingly difficult for the Tribal leaders in the midst of grappling with the impact of a federal government shutdown, various upcoming ceremonial activities, and leadership changes, your legal requirements remain. Under BLM's Handbook 1780-1, you are required to provide a minimum of 30-days for Tribes to comment, but are encouraged to lengthen the timeline where possible and when needed. We respectfully urge you to fulfill these duties during your review of PLO No. 7923 and further request that you stand down on your efforts to revoke the Chaco-area withdrawal.

Chaco Canyon is a sacred cultural landscape central to the identity of Tribes throughout New Mexico. The value of this living landscape does not end at the park boundary. It stretches for miles throughout the greater Chacoan landscape, where Pueblo communities continue to conduct pilgrimages and share stories with current and future generations. Reversing PLO No. 7923 places this heritage at risk. An informal buffer existed in this area for nearly a decade and the withdrawal of federal minerals in the area does not apply to lands held by Navajo allottees who maintain their mineral rights. The process to put the current withdrawal into place took 2.5 years with two opportunities for public comment, including a 120-day initial comment period. It also built off of the one-year leasing moratorium that Secretary Bernhardt placed on the 10-mile zone under President Trump's first term. It is outrageous that your Department would elect to completely reverse this process with only 14 days planned for public comment.

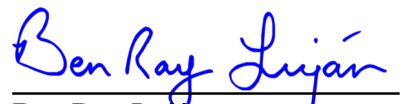
Approximately 4,730 documented archaeological sites exist within the 10-mile withdrawal area. Each one of these sites is unique, irreplaceable, and represents the history and story of Chaco Canyon. By proposing to remove the withdrawal completely, you are proposing to expose generations of sites, artifacts, and religion to heavy machinery that will erase them for good. We continue to extend the invitation to visit Chaco so you can experience firsthand the profound cultural and spiritual significance of this sacred landscape.

Your legal and moral responsibility as trustee to these Tribes requires your direct attention and involvement in this issue and for meaningful engagement with the Tribes before any action is taken.

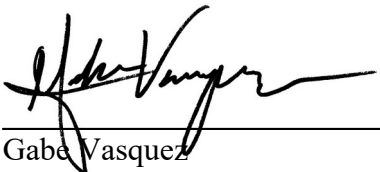
Sincerely,



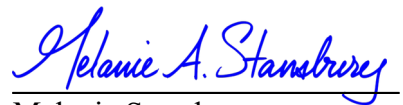
Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



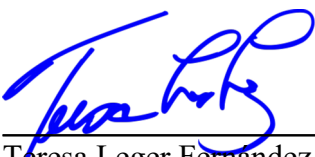
Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



Gabe Vasquez
Member of Congress



Melanie Stansbury
Member of Congress



Teresa Leger Fernandez
Member of Congress